

Letters to the Editor

Scoping Must be Done in Accordance with the Goal Definition, also in Social LCA

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A Framework for Social Life Cycle Impact Assessment
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In his Letter to the Editor 'ISO 14044 also Applies to Social LCA' [2], Bo Weidema raises the issue of using generic data for the social impacts of products along the product chain when conducting Social LCA. Social LCA is a very new discipline, and, reading our paper [1], Bo Weidema has understood that we dismiss the possibility of using generic data for Social LCA. This is a misunderstanding. We explicitly state in the paper that country- or region-specific information about the product chain may enable a crude assessment. We then continue to state that "...a conclusive assessment must be based on company-specific information for the most important companies in the product chain." This is not different from the approach normally taken in Environmental LCA, but as we go on to state "...in contrast to Environmental LCA, the Social LCA is highly site-specific in its data requirements, and the value of conducting Social LCA on the basis of generic product chains is normally limited."

The framework for a Social LCA methodology, which we describe in our paper, is meant to be applied by companies who wish to minimize the harmful impacts on peoples' lives from their product chains. With this goal, the methodology is naturally focused on those activities and impacts which the company has a possibility to influence by its management decisions. This is a scoping in accordance with our goal definition. As we explicitly state, "A framework developed from a societal perspective rather than a company perspective might thus look different." This would also be the case if we wanted the study to support a Social Life Cycle Impact Profile. Then we would have to aim to include the most important social impacts in the life cycle, regardless whether the company has any possibility to influence them or not.

This being said, we recognize the need for inclusion of the full life cycle in the study, at least at a screening level. Even if the company has no possibility to influence a raw material supplier far back in the product chain, it is still interesting to know whether there are potentially serious social issues in

this part of the life cycle. We therefore agree with Bo Weidema that generic data may serve the purpose of filling such data gaps, and here we acknowledge that we have expressed ourselves in an unfortunate way when we state "The need for company-specific information and data has consequences for the scoping of the product system in Social LCA, i.e. which parts of the product system need to be included." The whole life cycle should indeed be included, but, given that the methodology has the goal to support management decisions, it is obvious to focus the data collection efforts on the parts of the life cycle which the company can influence. This is also where the possibilities of getting specific data are the best.

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